

SCHILLEBEECKX FOR A NEW GENERATION AND NEW CONTEXTS
– INTEREST GROUP

Topic: Mysticism and the Future: Realizing the Truth of the World
Convener: Kathleen McManus, O.P., Dominican Sisters of Blauvelt, NY
Moderator: Julia Feder, Creighton University
Presenter: Adam Beyt, Fordham University
Elizabeth Pyne, Fordham University
Respondent: Mary Catherine Hilkert, O.P., University of Notre Dame

The presentations in this session both served in distinct ways to advance the dialogue between faith and culture which, as Catherine Hilkert noted, was at the center of Schillebeeckx's concern. Adam Beyt's paper, "*Human that Matter*," sought to explore how Schillebeeckx's sacramental language in relation to human embodiment might be extended to embrace the sacramentality of LGBTQ+ bodies. Moving from Schillebeeckx's early phenomenological approach in *The Eucharist* to his treatment of sacraments later in his life, along with his turn to political theology, Beyt explored convergences with Judith Butler's "Philosophy of the Human." In particular, Butler's work advocates for recognition of the dignity and full humanity of the marginalized. As Schillebeeckx proposes "transignification" as a more effective understanding and interpretation of the Eucharist, Butler's performative theory of the social construction of gender norms leaves room for their resignification and change. Beyt noted that "Schillebeeckx and Butler both recognize the way language shapes and is a part of human embodiment and the formation of a 'subject.'" Schillebeeckx's emphasis on the sacramental expression in the present of a future human fulfillment, Beyt concluded, "suggests that the eschatological vision implied in sacramental language can also validate new embodied ways of being in the world."

The evocative title of the second paper, by Elizabeth Pyne, was "'To Become Again What We Never Were': Irenaeus and Schillebeeckx on the Transformations of Finitude." Pyne proposed a reading of Irenaeus' account of the transformation of finitude that complements the Thomistic account and can serve as a "resource for engaging significant interpretive ambiguities in Schillebeeckx's approach to the goodness of creation and the meaning of the 'human cause.'" What Irenaeus and Schillebeeckx have in common, she proposes, is "a sense that creation has a task to become wholly itself and this means it must become what it has never been." Pyne interrogated the meaning of finite integrity in relation to the many faces of suffering and raised the question of whether a broader understanding of negative contrast experience would encompass the suffering that results from contingency and finitude. Ecological and evolutionary science, she noted, reveal the complex creaturely relationships in which our human finitude is enmeshed, problematizing the vocabulary of contrast. On the other hand, in the face of the eco-political precariousness of creation, "the danger of mystifying or naturalizing suffering that should not be remains paramount." For Pyne, the ethical and spiritual challenge lies in the question: "What should we seek to change and endeavor to be reconciled to?"

Mary Catherine Hilkert began her response with a suggestion that both presenters might want to clarify to what extent they see their work extending the lines of

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Schillebeeckx's thought, and to what extent they see their own constructive work as moving beyond his thought or in disagreement with it.

Addressing Adam Beyt, Hilkert suggested a nuancing of Butler's theory of the social construction of gender in relation to Schillebeeckx's reference to a certain objective "givenness" in experience that is, nevertheless, subject to perception and interpretation. She wondered if he had considered how Butler might respond to the interrelatedness of Schillebeeckx's anthropological constants for the creation of ethical norms in the protection of human dignity. Hilkert invites expanded reflection on how Schillebeeckx's language of sacraments, especially in relation to human bodies, might "reignite the Catholic sacramental imagination regarding LGBTQ+ embodiment and what that means." Finally, while acknowledging Beyt's engagement of Butler as an interlocutor who can help expand Schillebeeckx's project, Hilkert challenges him to consider whether there are "ways in which Schillebeeckx's explicitly theological project can enrich and/or raise any critical questions about Butler's project?"

Turning to Elizabeth Pyne's paper, Hilkert reflected at length on her discussion of finitude in light of creation faith as well as the question of whether "negative contrast experience" has been interpreted too narrowly and should be extended to all forms of suffering. Hilkert would not make such an identification, or speak of "contingency as contrast," because "by definition, negative contrast experience is 'a veto of the world as it is'...and gives rise to ethical action for change, but in terms of finitude as the ultimate boundary of creatureliness, no such change is possible." She notes that at the end of her paper, Pyne "seems to agree that the suffering that results from finitude does not fit in the mode of contrast, but that the real question is how to discern the difference between the two and respond accordingly." Hilkert concluded by inviting Pyne to consider how Irenaeus might help to correct or extend Schillebeeckx's account of finitude, suffering, sin, and salvation.

Julia Feder facilitated the lively discussion that ensued among participants and presenters.

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